

Lectionary C August 7, 2016 12th Sunday after Pentecost
Grace and Peace Lutheran Church, Evansville, IN
Pastor Roberta Meyer

Genesis 15:1-6
Psalm 33:12-22
Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16
Luke 12:32-40

Do Not Be Afraid

A friend of mine called me Friday to tell me about her week. Not good. First of all she had just returned from a two week vacation to find that the electricity was off in part of her house—the part where the air conditioner, the refrigerator, and the freezer were powered. Disaster, right? When I was “Oh, my-ing” that news she tells me, “Wait, you haven’t heard the worst.” She was exhausted after all the drama about the electricity so when she went to bed that night she went right off to sleep—until her dog, jumped up in the middle of the night barking like she had never heard him bark before. Startled she sat up and there standing in front of her was a person, in her house. Yelling at the person, she couldn’t tell if it was a male or female, must have frightened him or her, because the thief in the night grabbed both her cell phone and her husband’s and ran out the door.

She was scared out of her wits. That was the last thing she expected. And there’s more. She did something foolish that evening. She knows it was. She left her truck unlocked with the keys in it—and her billfold. Seems the burglar used the keys to get into her house. Yes, she lost a lot that night. Her cell phone, with all her stuff in it, and her bill fold with all her cards and ID. And they had to have a locksmith out to put new locks on the doors, and she had to call the bank and change all her accounts. And she can’t sleep now. She hugs and big ball bat at night, now.

Oh, I’m sure she spent a little bit of time kicking herself for leaving her keys in the truck, but that won’t do any good. And the thoughts probably went through her head about what could have been. First of all she could have been killed. You hear about that sort of thing happening all the time. Yes, she lost several hundred dollars of stuff that she now has to replace, but—why—why didn’t the perpetrator steal the truck? It’s not a bad vehicle. Or her husband’s vehicle? They took the key to his car off her key chain and searched his car, too. But there was nothing they wanted in it.

The thing is yes, she has some trauma from this incident. She definitely learned some lessons, but this event didn’t cripple her forever. After telling me all about it she said, “And Roberta, it has not taken my joy.” The things that count the most in her life, the thief could never take away.

“Do not be afraid.” We hear this in two places in our scripture readings today. First, God is reassuring Abram. He is being called to pack up what he has and go where no man has gone before, at least no man he knows. And then—God tells him something he can’t figure out how

can ever come true. Here is their conversation. *Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5 He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be."* Abram and his wife are old and Sarah was barren. This was pretty unbelievable. But guess what? Abram believed God.

Jesus is talking to his disciples in our Gospel lesson. They are being prepared to be sent out as Jesus' ambassadors to the world. *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* Jesus is talking crazy talk as far as they are concerned. Because what they hear Jesus calling them to is what theologians call non-complimentary behavior. That is when one's actions go completely against the norm. Trusting God in a world that constantly screams "be afraid" is non-complimentary behavior. And so is loving one's enemy. And what about this stuff about being ready, for this "thief in the night" God who is coming when they least expect it. Get ready, how? Not by building up a strong hold and stocking up stuff. Jesus tells them to sell their stuff, and give generously to the poor. Non-complementary behavior.

Our Hebrews text tells us Abram's faith in God's non-complementary promise to him changed things. *"By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren"* It made no sense in human terms, but Abram had faith in God's promise. And the Message Bible tells it like this. *"That's how it happened that from one man's dead and shriveled loins there are now people numbering into the millions."*

So what about us, here, today? In this world where we are bombarded with messages of fear, all we have to do is look at the news and hear our would-be leaders relentlessly tell us, even shout at us, all about the things that we should fear—what is God saying to us? Listen. Can you hear God's calm voice? "Do not be afraid, little flock."

You see, fear blocks us from dreaming and hoping. It paralyzes our actions, and keeps us from thriving. Some Christian organizations are just as guilty of this as the politicians, painting a picture of doom and gloom and plain terror for those who don't by their particular brand of "Christianity." This closes us from each other. It builds barriers. It keeps us from working together.

But what happens when we listen to Jesus? "Do not be afraid. I have this. I took care of what could ever really harm you with my life, death and resurrection. You have nothing to fear! Go ahead, trust me. Be non-complementary. Love your enemies. Share generously. Take risks. Use Abram as an example."

I saw a video of an experiment to guys tried. One was Muslim and one was an orthodox Jew. The dressed in their traditional garb, the Muslim with his head cover and flowing robe and the Jewish man with his hat and black clothing. They walked down a the street together with their arms around each other, first in a Muslim community and then in a Jewish neighborhood, then finally in a mixed community. They got attention. People did those second glances. It was non-complementary to say the least. But the what happened was pretty wonderful. People came up

to them and asked to take their picture together. People hugged them and thanked them. Their non-complimentary presence started conversation and there were smiles and even laughter. They changed things by just trusting God's promise and stepping over a barrier.

That's the thing, when people practice non-complimentary behavior incredible things happen, community forms, and a welcoming atmosphere conquers fear.

What would happen if we all just grabbed hold of God's promise for ourselves? One commentary asks this. "What would we do, dare, attempt, if we believed the power of God's promise? That God gives us all we need to be carriers of God's love to everyone? We see it work when we welcome and embrace those who are mistreated by society, the very poor, the LGBT folks, addicts, prisoners, those of different races and religions. We do some of this now, here at Grace and Peace. I'm wondering, though, how much more can happen when we really whole heartedly believe in God's call and shed the fear? If we stopped holding onto stuff that we think we can't live without, whether these things are ideas or real tangible possessions. How will each of our work places change? Our neighborhoods? Our communities.

You heard it. With one old shriveled up man God changed the world. Just think what can happen when we all go out and show our non-complementary-faith- in- God- behavior to the world. *"Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."* Amen.